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# Public Participation in Municipal Service Delivery Review

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**Public Participation in Municipal Service Delivery Review**

Challenges and Opportunities for  
Ontario's Municipal Governance

MPA Research Report

Submitted to

The Local Government Program  
Department of Political Science  
The University of Western Ontario

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November 2013

## **Abstract**

Municipalities in Ontario are under continued pressure to restrict their budgets. As the economy ebbs and flows between growth and decline, political pressure to rein in spending on services follows suit. Consequently, municipal administrators are must develop new ways to evaluate their spending to identify efficiencies. However, these techniques require trial and error to make them work like all new programs.

One such technique is the municipal Service Delivery Review (SDR). Municipalities in Ontario have used SDRs since the early 2000s. Due to the complexity and scope of these reviews, many municipalities in Ontario have approached the provincial government for assistance in developing their own SDRs. In 2004, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) responded by creating the *Guide to Service Delivery Review for Municipal Managers* (the Guide). This “how-to” manual was intended to offer municipalities a comprehensive directed study for planning and implementing their own SDR. However, comprehensive provisions to engage public participation are conspicuously absent from the Guide.

From a broad point of view, it makes logical sense that a comprehensive review of services should incorporate feedback from those that use the services. However, both the Guide and completed SDRs exclude public participation from the process. Instead, municipalities use SDRs to reduce costs without considering how the public values service. The municipalities have retained professionals to analyze and suggest changes to services that will ultimately lower their costs.

This paper evaluates the Guide and six municipal SDRs in Ontario and questions whether public participation has any place in a municipal SDR. The results of the investigation suggest that SDRs in Ontario have consistently reduced or omitted public participation from the process.

This omission has led citizens to question the validity of SDRs which has limited the degree of community acceptance of the new service provisions.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

There is significant academic study regarding the difficulties faced by municipalities who struggle with budgetary constraints and increasing service demands. The global economic downturn in 2008 increased the urgency and severity of municipal efforts to find solutions to budgetary constraints while simultaneously maintaining service delivery.

One method that municipalities have utilized to evaluate the cost efficiency of their services is the municipal service delivery review (SDR). This comprehensive process is widely viewed in Ontario as a beneficial method of evaluating many services and providing significant data regarding their delivery. However, some groups of citizens have questioned the validity and usefulness of these SDRs because they lack comprehensive public engagement regarding the services of which they are the primary users (Bob Casselman, 2010). Conversely, municipalities consider these reviews to be business cases that should only be conducted by suitable professionals (Ontario, Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario, Municipal Finance Officers' Association of Ontario, & Ontario Municipal Administrators' Association, 2004).

This paper will address these competing viewpoints and answer the question of what the opportunities and limitations exist for public participation in the municipal SDR process. The answers to this question will first be addressed through a literature review that investigates SDRs in Ontario, as well as, their basic structure. This paper will also consider international SDRs which develop best practices in public participation. Additionally, this paper will examine the major themes related to public participation and how they impact the review process based on the evaluation of six case studies of SDRs conducted by Ontario municipalities.

## **Chapter 2: Definition and Purpose of SDR**

Some services within municipalities are constantly threatened by budget cuts, outsourcing, downsizing or amalgamation, while other services are not as visible, operating



inefficiently and not providing citizens with effective service. SDRs attempt to measure the performance and cost efficiency of municipal service delivery and also identify operational efficiencies. Much of the rationale for reviewing service delivery is economic, but the evolving needs of the constituency and access to technology can trigger assessments (Ontario et al., 2004).

SDRs are a complex evaluation of services provided by municipalities. The Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) defines a SDR as, “an evaluation process in which a specific municipal service is systematically reviewed to determine the most appropriate way to provide it” (Ontario et al., 2004). In 2004, the MMAH responded to growing municipal interest in conducting SDRs by developing an aid for municipalities to begin their own reviews. A Guide to Service Delivery Review for Municipal Managers (the Guide) represents the MMAH’s comprehensive manual for municipalities to undertake SDRs.

The MMAH’s definition of SDRs within the Guide assists municipalities in, “reducing the cost of [service] delivery while maintaining or improving services and service levels” (Ontario et al., 2004, p. 3). The basis of consideration in this definition is cost impact. According to the Guide, SDRs are undertaken in order to reduce costs while maintaining or bettering the current level of services within a municipality. However, the definition and purpose proposed by the Guide appears to be structured in a way that limits the opportunities for citizen participation in the review process.

### **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

#### **Imperative for Public Participation**

Public participation in municipalities is often a difficult endeavor which can be hampered by the struggle for power between elites and the underclass (Arnstein, 1969). The struggle is compounded further by the complexity inherent in attempting to make sense out of the public’s competing sets of voices (Bishop & Davis, 2002). In her review, Arnstein (1969) showed that , in

the past, many municipalities attempted to avoid or minimize the public participation process. In spite of this opinion, many scholars have continued to calculate methods of participation at the local government level (Bishop & Davis, 2002).

Before methods of participation are evaluated, the initial question must be asked regarding whether or not participation is a requirement for municipalities. In the Ontario municipal system, there is first and foremost a legislative requirement to engage in public participation for certain actions such as land use planning and electoral reform (*Municipal Act, 2001, S.O. 2001, c. 25, 2001*)(Province of Ontario, 1990). However, these legislative requirements in Ontario do not include actions or studies such as a SDR.

Beyond the legislative requirement, there is also a need to pursue the opinions of residents in order to establish legitimacy for the actions of a municipal council. As Arnstein commented in 1969, “Participation of the governed in their government is, in theory, the cornerstone of democracy - a revered idea that is vigorously applauded by virtually everyone”(Arnstein, 1969, p. 216). However, according to Arnstein when she described her “Ladder of Participation” in 1969, the implications of participation can create divisions in communities, especially when groups divided along racial and economic lines begin to hold greater sway. Conversely, when governments ignore their residents and act in ways that do not represent the wishes of the community at-large, those governments can face significant consequences (Zelić & Stahl, 2005) (Reilly, Emma, 2013).

The legislative requirement for municipalities to engage in public participation in Ontario is mostly centered on land planning processes (Sancton, 2011). Ontario is somewhat unique as some of its planning law would suggest that the level of environmental assessment and related public participation required for major infrastructure is “onerous” (Northey, 2010). Under the Ontario *Planning Act*, municipalities must hold a public meeting to obtain input from residents whenever the municipality seeks to change zoning, the official plan, or subdivide land (Province

of Ontario, 1990). Additionally, the *Municipal Act* requires that municipalities hold a public meeting whenever they choose to reorganize the municipality through the annexation of land, change the composition of the municipal council, or change the rate of pay for municipal councillors during their term (*Municipal Act, 2001, S.O. 2001, c. 25, 2001*). Essentially, these few occasions mark the times when the Province of Ontario has mandated that their municipalities must engage the public in the form of a public meeting, a type of interaction that will be explored later in this paper.

In addition to the legislative requirements for public participation, there also exists the democratic imperative that Arnstein referred to. This imperative is directly related to how much power citizens have within a democracy (Arnstein, 1969). In the case of the introduction of electronic voting in Irish local elections, the failure to listen or engage citizens on the matter eventually led the government to cancel their project at a cost of €50 million Euro while many politicians lost their electoral seats (Zelić & Stahl, 2005). Despite high profile examples that show the embarrassment of governments that don't consult their citizens, inviting the public to engage in daily activities of municipal government would be highly inefficient and time consuming. However, ignoring public engagement will inhibit the effectiveness of municipal decision making.

### **Municipal Public Participation**

The republican principle demands that the deliberate sense of the community should govern the conduct of those to whom they entrust the management of their affairs; but it does not require an unqualified complaisance to every sudden breeze of passion, or to every transient impulse which the people may receive from the arts of men, who flatter their prejudices to betray their interests [...] it is the duty of the persons whom they have appointed to be the guardians of those interests, to withstand the temporary delusion, in order to give them time and opportunity for more cool and sedate reflection (Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay, & Lawrence Goldman, 2008)

As Hamilton et al. express, democratic representation can be a delicate balancing act when engaging with citizens. Encouraging public participation can often be fraught with concern and apprehension. As described earlier, Arnstein found that the application of public

participation or citizen power immediately resulted in divisions along racial and economic lines in the United States during the 1960's. However, King et al. found that, "There is also a growing recognition on the part of administrators that decision making without public participation is ineffective" (1998, p. 319). Rather than attempting to limit the opportunities for participation, municipal administrators should learn how to engage with the public in more efficient and successful ways.

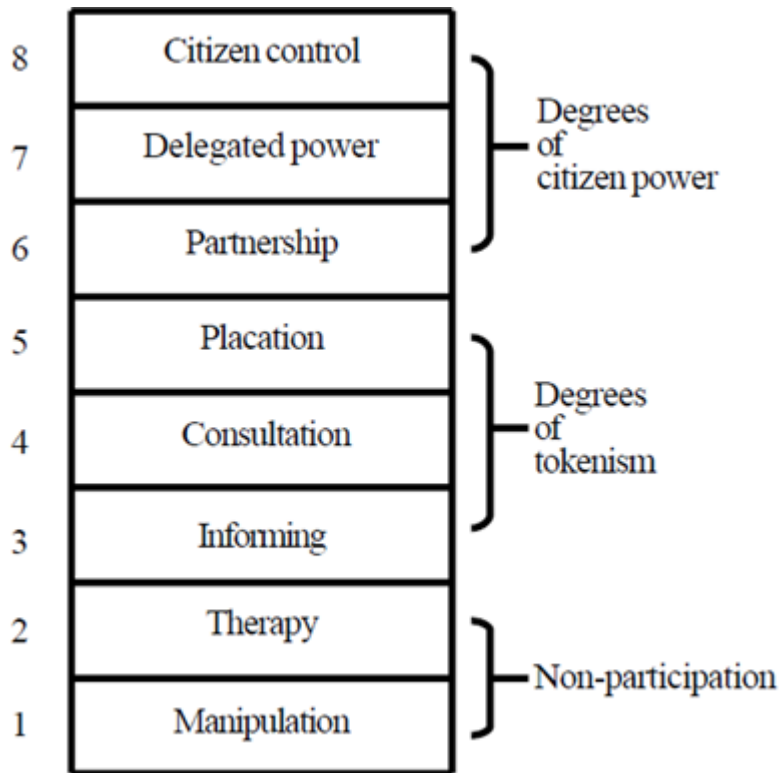
To categorize and understand the types of citizen participation, Arnstein created a ladder of participation to describe the "extent of citizens' power in determining the end product" of government actions (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217). These eight levels of participation are: Manipulation, Therapy, Informing, Consultation, Placation, Partnership, Delegated Power and Citizen Control (Arnstein, 1969).

Broadly, these eight levels are split into three groups of participation types: (1) Non-Participation, (2) Tokenism, and (3) Citizen Power as seen in Figure 1. Non-Participation is comprised of manipulation and therapy. Power holders in the government attempt to control citizens through the manipulation of information and moralistic persuasion to comply with the desires of the administration. Arnstein compares these ladder rungs to town meetings or advisory committees where citizens are gathered and simply told how the government will act. In this case, all dissenters are accused of challenging the will of the majority for their own selfish gain (Arnstein, 1969).

The second group of rungs, Tokenism, is where the rungs of informing, consultation, and placation describe how the government only makes uni-directional attempts to interact with citizens. These rungs illustrate how communication can be weighted in unidirectional flows so that any engagement is used to keep citizens calm and powerless to affect change.

Finally, the last three rungs that make up Citizen Power are partnership, delegated power and citizen control. Arnstein frames these rungs in a graduation of citizen control as power is

gained when government power is diminished (Arnstein, 1969). She states that, “In most cases where power has come to be shared it was taken by the citizens, not given by the city” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 222).



**Figure 1: Eight Rungs of Citizen Control**

Source: (Bishop & Davis, 2002, p. 17)

From this comment, Arnstein argues that power is a contested commodity that is subject to tight controls. While this view of participation was designed by Arnstein to be “provocative” (1969, p. 216), Bishop and Davis argue that it is also too rigidly formulated as a continuum (Bishop & Davis, 2002).

By investigating the history and formulation of thought on participation, Bishop and Davis ask a number of probing questions about participation in order to understand the

relationship between the traditional representative institutions and new consultative processes.

These questions are, “

- Is it participation when government seeks citizen views but still makes an unpalatable decision?
- Or does meaningful participation require a community veto over policy choices?
- And if so, who defined the relevant community? (Bishop & Davis, 2002, p. 16).

With these questions, Bishop and Davis begin to separate and clarify the various methods of participation, including the concept of direct democracy, which they define through a lens of citizen control in governments:

The idea of direct democracy proposes a more continuous, active role for citizens. Theorists who call for the implementation of such an idea are proposing much more significant levels of participation that prevail in a representative democracy, through such institutional mechanisms as direct local assemblies or the extensive use of referenda. In contemporary political life such ideas have achieved considerable prominence because of the size, impersonality and power of modern governments, whose elected politicians appear accessible and, in any case, seem to have become dominated by non-elected parts of the governing system, notable bureaucracies (Munro-Clark, M, 1992, p. 22)

The application of direct democracy appears to be the only type of participation that meets Arnstein's rung of citizen control. On the continuum, participation is labelled according to its varying degrees of meaningfulness (Bishop & Davis, 2002). According to the continuum model, Bishop and Davis note that not all forms of participation are 'real,' bringing the risk that, “direct democracy [is] the only test for a participative mechanism. Most forms of official participation in policy making fail such a stringent requirement” (Bishop & Davis, 2002, p. 18).

Bishop and Davis then evaluate further theories of participation which link participation styles to policy problems. These theories suggest that the policy issue at hand should determine which participation mechanism is used (Bishop & Davis, 2002). In this model, taken from John Clayton Thomas (1990, 1993), managers must answer the question of when and how participation should be used. Thomas's methods are shown in Figure 2.

Style of Decision Making	One Organised Group	Multiple Organised Groups	Unorganised Public	Complex Public**
Modified Autonomous Managerial	Key contacts	Key contacts	Citizen survey	Key contacts/ Survey
Segmented Public Consultation	Key contacts	Contacts/Series of meetings	Citizen survey	Citizen survey/ Meetings
Unitary Public Consultation	Meeting(s) with group	CAC* or series of meetings	Series of public meetings	CAC* and/or meetings
Public Decision	Negotiate with group	Negotiate with CAC*	Series of public public meetings	CAC*/Public meetings

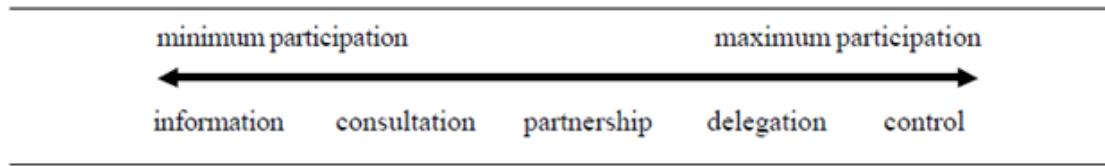
\* CAC = Citizens advisory committee

\*\* Complex Public = Some combination of organised and unorganised groups

**Figure 2: A Matrix Guide to Public Involvement**

Source: (Bishop & Davis, 2002, p. 19)

Following Thomas's arguments, Bishop and Davis return to the continuum model but remove the ethical limits placed on participation by Arnstein. In these other continuum models outlined by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, all forms of participation are deemed to be valid and can be effectively utilized despite earlier objections. These options are described from the perspective of public officials and do not represent movement towards a goal within the continuum, but rather exist as choices available to officials (Bishop & Davis, 2002). The continuum shown in Figure 3 contains many of the same items that Arnstein highlighted, but they exist as tools without the imperative of moving towards a destination.



**Figure 3: The Shand-Arnberg Participation Continuum**

Source: (Bishop & Davis, 2002, p. 20)

In the information stage, governments provide specific details to citizens to encourage discussion. If the situation or issue calls for an informational campaign rather than a complex network of citizen committees, then public administrators should not be forced to use efforts which would be considered to exist in Arnstein's model.

Bishop and Davis also examine public participation as discontinuous interaction. This view argues that the “discontinuous nature of policy problems, the influence of local history over approaches to participation, and the overlapping application of mechanisms argue for a schema that is descriptive rather than normative” (Bishop & Davis, 2002, p. 21). Administrators can rarely devise and control the methods by which citizens will choose to participate. Further, the continuum belief lacks an ability to account for citizen groups outside the control of the government such as lobbyists, community organizations, and industry or commercial groups. Therefore, participation must be understood as it occurs, rather than seeking to define the range of participation as a set of opportunities that are based on power dynamics between the government and those that are governed.

Bishop & Davis see five modern participation types, each of which is related to specific policy instruments (Bishop & Davis, 2002). Participation as “consultation” strives to bring interest groups and public meetings together to receive comment on policy matters. Participation as “partnership” focuses on the creation of committees and advisory boards to help devise, but not approve, policy. Participation as “standing” draws participation through legal matters. The



ability of citizens to affect change through legal action is not discussed in the continuum proposals despite its common occurrence. Participation as “consumer choice” encompasses the user pay approach where citizens who choose their policy product by what they wish to pay for. Finally, participation as “control” puts the final choice of decision making in citizen’s hands through the use of referenda.

By understanding the policy issue at hand, both citizens and public administrators can work with the participation mechanisms that occur. In this fourth viewpoint, Bishop and Davis create a map of participation types (Figure 4). This map helps governments respond to the participation types that are available.

Administrators can continue to tailor the planning and evaluation processes in municipalities by understanding the imperative for public participation and the forms that it takes. As Arnstein and others have shown, the view of participation as set points along a continuum is an approach that explains most situations. However, there is a developing understanding that public participation is highly dependent on the political situation in which it occurs. The political agenda, combined with parties involved and local interests will drive types of participation that municipal officials will adopt. With a greater understanding of the elements of participation, both citizens and public officials have the ability to engage in a process that is much more meaningful.

Participation Type	Objective	Key Instruments	Limitations
Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to gauge community reaction to a proposal and invite feedback</li> <li>consultation is only participation when information gathered can influence subsequent policy choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>key contacts</li> <li>surveys</li> <li>interest group meetings</li> <li>public meetings</li> <li>discussion papers</li> <li>public hearings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>delay between consultation and any outcomes</li> <li>communities feel betrayed if they do not like the decision</li> <li>expensive and time consuming for complex decisions</li> </ul>
Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>involving citizens and interest groups in aspects of government decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>advisory boards</li> <li>citizens advisory committees</li> <li>policy community forum</li> <li>public inquiries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>issue of who can seek for a community</li> <li>bias toward established interest groups</li> <li>legitimacy issues with those excluded from the process</li> </ul>
Standing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>allowing third parties to become involved in the review process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>review courts and tribunals</li> <li>open and third party standing</li> <li>statutory processes for social and environmental impact assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>only relevant for those issues which come to court</li> <li>expensive and time consuming</li> <li>bias toward well funded interests</li> <li>legal approach may be inappropriate for some issues</li> </ul>
Consumer Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>allowing customer preferences to shape a service through choices of products and providers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>surveys, focus groups</li> <li>purchaser/provider splits</li> <li>competition between suppliers</li> <li>vouchers</li> <li>case management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>relevant only for service delivery issues</li> </ul>
Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to hand control of an issue to the electorate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>referendum</li> <li>'community parliaments'</li> <li>electronic voting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>costly, time consuming and often divisive</li> <li>are issue votes the best way to encourage deliberation?</li> </ul>

**Figure 4: Map of Participation Types**

Source: (Bishop & Davis, 2002, p. 27)

### **International SDR Example**

Concepts of effective participation are discussed in several international examples that highlight how participation benefits municipal service reviews. Dollery et al. (2011) investigate service review structures related to the experience of an Australian municipality that was facing a choice from a higher tier of government to either amalgamate with neighbouring municipalities or reduce service delivery costs. Lamothe (2008) also looks at municipal service delivery arrangements and examines how and why service delivery evolves in American local governments.

In their article *“Bottom-up” Internal Reform in Australian Local Government: The Lake Macquarie City Council Review Process*, Dollery et al. focused on the differentiation of structural change versus process change to decrease costs in a single municipality. In the Australian context, there is a significant trend to promote top-down, forced amalgamations in an attempt to seek municipal cost savings. The Lake Macquarie City Council (LMCC) initiated a bottom-up service review process based on research that suggests that many hidden costs are present in forced amalgamations. The article continues by describing the overall structure of the review process. The key components of the LMCC process included heavy emphasis on broader citizen engagement in service review processes. This sentiment is also evident in the follow-up of the action plan which promotes an open and transparent process that is inclusive of community and elected officials (Dollery et al., 2011). Further investigation of the LMCC service review outside of Dollery’s article shows that the municipality prepared a specific Community Engagement Strategy as part of a commitment to: “collaborate with the community regarding services and facilities, and review their recommendations for modifying, optimising, creating, reducing, or withdrawing services as part of our decision-making process” (Service Review Community Engagement Core Group, 2009 p. 3).

For the LMCC, the participation of the community was pivotal to the success of the service review. The community was engaged through many different methods including, the

provision of information, consultation, direct involvement, and collaboration (Service Review Community Engagement Core Group, 2009). Each of these methods deployed various approaches including information sheets, stakeholder consultation, focus groups and study circles. This broad approach was underpinned by a Core Community Advisory Group made up of 15-25 participants who had very fundamental and strategic roles in the review. This highly involved group was expected to collaborate with the municipal council to in order to,

- Understand Council operations, services and financial pressures
  - Assess service against service
  - Assess financial restrictions against services
  - Identify levels and standards of services that best meet their needs and expectations
  - Review, comment and modify the ongoing recommendations / solutions put forth by community focus groups
  - Examine options for modifying, optimising, reducing, creating or withdrawing a service
  - Provide advice and innovation in formulating solutions and preferred outcomes for a service
- (Service Review Community Engagement Core Group, 2009 p. 4)

The Australian case suggests there is a strong need to establish a basic vision for the SDR that underpins and subsequently drives the review process. Dollery et al. acknowledge that,

LMCC should have undertaken a high level strategic review prior to the detailed review of individual services. This would have incorporated the ‘big picture’ questions that LMMC and other local authorities must consider, especially given the probable changes in the forthcoming decades, involving climate change, an aging population, etc... If services are considered in relative isolation, the opportunity to address these broader issues and substantially transform service delivery can be limited. (Dollery et al., 2011, p. 19)

Dollery et al. suggest that the review benefitted from larger involvement by stakeholders in the process. Following the completion of LMCC’s Service Review, two of the three most important advantages of the LMCC’s approach were:

The extensive involvement of the workforce, complemented by an independent panel, to achieve a balance of ‘internally driven change’ and ‘external independence’; Open and transparent engagement with the local community and elected councillors which demonstrates that the organisation is objectively auditing its operations to achieve outcomes that meet local community needs. (Dollery et al., 2011, p. 19)

The LMCC consistently focused on sustained involvement from both internal and external stakeholders such as council, staff and citizens. The community groups provided feedback on areas that were not the typical concerns of non-professionals. Specifically, “They have assisted the work groups with examining options for modifying and optimising services, and providing technical or specific information as appropriate” (Walker, 2010, p. 71). The provision of technical information is not a typical opportunity that is expected to be provided to the public. Arnstein’s ladder highlighted that the greatest extent of citizen power would be the ability to have decision making power, which is different than the power to provide empirical advice. This inclusion of the public in such a deep manner fits with the long term view of the council.

While the business plans and professional evaluation of cost efficiencies took place, it occurred with sustained involvement from the public. Engaging the public in this process was both time consuming and, consequently, expensive. The LMCC information gathering stage lasted well over a year and the entire project was discussed in front of the Council many times (Dollery et al., 2011; Walker, 2010). Even with the longer time frame and higher costs, the end result of the LMCC service review was one that has generated significant public support and acted as a reference point to inform broader discussions of municipal strategic planning (Dollery et al., 2011).

The LMCC case shows that municipal SDRs can greatly benefit from a high degree of public interaction and engagement. The requirement of public interaction in this case was due to the SDR acting as a mechanism for long term planning in a municipality. Strategic planning and long term policy making are areas of municipal activity that greatly benefit from public engagement. The LMCC acknowledges that the service review fostered long-term financial sustainability that fit within their 10 year community plan and four year delivery program (Walker, 2010). Roughly estimated, the service review was set to “reduce the expenditure on purchases by more than \$2m per year” for three years (Walker, 2010, p. 70).

SDRs evaluate services that are directly consumed by the citizen. If those citizens are not engaged, it is equivalent to altering pre-sold goods at a store without consulting the buyer. However, SDRs in Ontario appear to be very different from that seen in the LMCC case.

#### **Chapter 4: Methodology**

By establishing the review of public participation and how it can be employed in a municipal SDR from international examples, I can now evaluate Ontario specific examples against these criteria. To understand the current structure or proposed structure of SDRs in Ontario, I will first evaluate the Guide to determine whether it proposes a useful SDR structure that has adequate provisions for public participation. This evaluation will be conducted by examining literature pertaining to the SDR process and the opportunities and limitations of public participation. Once this review of the Guide has been conducted, I will then narrow the evaluation to examine public participation in specific municipal SDRs in Ontario.

The province of Ontario has 445 municipalities. Many municipalities routinely engage in the dissemination of information by using SDRs or similar processes. These reviews are conducted through websites and governmental organizations such as the Association of the Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and the Association of Municipal Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO). However, some municipalities may choose not to publish reviews that are conducted solely on an internal basis or alternatively, because of constraints such as opportunity, time, or internet knowledge will limit citizen opportunity to disseminate information. Additionally, as noted above, SDRs come in many different guises. They may be called service reviews, core service reviews, delivery reviews, corporate service reviews, value for service delivery, operational review, or many other names. Therefore, accurate data on how many municipalities in Ontario have conducted a SDR is not available at this time without a

comprehensive survey of municipalities that contains an educational component to guide responses on what a SDR is comprised of.

Without a comprehensive list of municipalities that have conducted a SDR, I have conducted a search of available information from municipal websites and organizations that collect reports such as the SDR. From these sources, 24 SDRs were identified that evaluate services in the municipality as a whole rather than just one or two services within the municipality. Of these municipalities, I have chosen to review six SDRs from municipalities of three separate population sizes; two from those under 30,000, two from those between 30,000-100,000 and two from those over 100,000. These municipalities were also chosen based the availability of information regarding their SDR process, as well as, the methods by which they were conducted. The six case studies present a broad range of SDR processes. Some closely follow the Guide while others were developed solely by the municipality and/or their consultants. Additionally, some SDRs were conducted strictly by internal staff while others had sections conducted by consultants and others were conducted completely by third parties. The municipalities which will be evaluated are:

<b>Population Under 30,000</b>	<b>Population Between 30,000-100,000</b>	<b>Population Over 100,000</b>
Brockville: 21,870	Brantford: 93,650	Barrie: 136,063
Port Hope: 16,214	Halton Hills: 59,008	Hamilton: 519,949

**Figure 5: List of Municipal Case Studies**

After evaluating different forms of public participation in these municipalities from the literature and reports available, I have then created a matrix of five public participation criteria with which to evaluate the case studies. This type of evaluation will provide a clear view into how municipalities are encouraging participation during the SDR process and give a firm basis for offering suggestions of how to enhance the SDR process with regards to public participation. It will also highlight the benefits of a participatory process.

## **Chapter 5: Evaluation Matrix**

To evaluate the quality of public participation in the SDR case studies, an evaluation matrix will be used. This matrix will focus on five criteria derived from the literature review:

1. Invitation to Participate
2. Diversity of Participants
3. Opportunity to Participate
4. Level of Participant Power
5. Follow -Up

These criteria are important distinctions within SDRs as they specifically identify the potential impact of public participation on a service delivery review.

The first criterion to be evaluated is the *Invitation to Participate*. This criterion encompasses not only the decision to allow the public to participate in a SDR, but also the methods by which the municipality decides to structure that invitation. Municipalities label the invitation in different ways. Some municipalities invite external stakeholder engagement through newspaper articles, website postings, public postings, etc. However, others may choose to limit public participation altogether and focus on input from varying levels of staff and council.

While offering to let the public participate in a SDR is a crucial step in the process, there are varying degrees by which that offer occurs. Typically, the type of offer is linked to the style of participation that municipal administration wish to engage. In the LMCC case discussed in the literature review, the municipal council formulated a report on the community engagement strategy. This strategy was communicated to residents well ahead of the SDR initiation. Over 7,000 invitations to participate were sent to residents to confirm their interest in participating. Consequently, the public was able to prepare and engage in the process from the beginning



(Service Review Community Engagement Core Group, 2009). Conversely, other municipalities may choose to involve the public only after the SDR has begun. The *Invitation to Participate* may require initiative on the citizen's part, such as accessing a small link on an underused section of their website. Therefore, how the *Invitation to Participate* is prepared matters greatly in how the public engaged from the beginning. This matrix will evaluate the *Invitation to Participate* with regard to the clarity of the message in SDR case studies and subsequently determine when and how the public were first made aware of their opportunities to take part in the process.

The second criteria to be evaluated is the *Diversity of Participants*. As Gibson states in his examination of the criteria and processes for Sustainability Assessments,

In formal deliberative processes...questions about what purposes will be served are answered in part by what is written into the defining framework...These characteristics affect who gets heard and what gets considered and how some concerns come to be favoured over others in the resulting deliberations. (Gibson & Hassan, 2005, p. 87).

The Guide is deliberately wary of public participation due to the concerns listed by Gibson. The Guide warns administrators that “the most vocal positions may not accurately reflect the views of council's constituency” (Ontario et al., 2004, p. 18).

Two methods of combatting the tendency to favour the vocal minority are proposed by Gibson as the requirements for intragenerational equity and intergenerational equity. Intragenerational equity is defined as the requirement to, “Ensure that sufficiency and effective choices for all are pursued in ways that reduce dangerous gaps in sufficiency and opportunity (and health, security, social recognition, political influence etc.) between the rich and the poor” (Gibson & Hassan, 2005, p. 101). King et al supports this type of equity stating that effective public participation supports a method where the power imbalance between the rich and poor is reduced (King et al., 1998).

Gibson's second method is intergenerational equity which is the requirement to, “Favour present options and action that are most likely to preserve or enhance the

opportunities and capabilities of future generations to live sustainably” (Gibson & Hassan, 2005, p. 103). While Gibson is focusing mainly on environmental sustainability, the requirement to enhance the structural processes so that they do not disadvantage future generations is easily applicable to both SDR and political processes. For example, if a SDR favours short term savings on a required service such as infrastructure, there exists the likelihood of higher taxes being levied in subsequent years.

The third criterion for evaluation is the *Opportunity to Participate*. This criteria focuses on the methods through which citizens participate. As shown by Bishop and Davis, there are many different methods of public participation. Rather than focusing on the continuum approach, all forms of participation have merit based on the situational context (Bishop & Davis, 2002). This understanding is put into practice in the LMCC case. The Australian municipality utilized 14 distinct methods of engagement (Service Review Community Engagement Core Group, 2009). These criteria also incorporate King et al.’s (1998) imperative to allow for the realities of daily life to inform the process. These realities promote flexible meeting schedules or the use of electronic documents accessed from the internet (King et al., 1998). Due to the complex and far ranging nature of SDRs, utilizing multiple avenues of participation opportunities will allow municipalities to draw out a more committed group of participants. These criteria lead directly into an evaluation of the effectiveness of participation types.

The fourth criterion is the *Level of Participant Power*. As seen earlier, Arnstein and Bishop & Davis offer differing views on whether public participation is best seen as a continuum or a set of techniques defined by the problem at hand. Despite the differences, both arguments advocate a similar purpose for public participation to “...incorporate stakeholders in the interests of better project results” (Bishop & Davis, 2002, p. 15). Therefore, some forms of participant power must be present to improve the

result. Confirmation that the SDR is granting power to the participants will be assessed by asking series of questions relating to Arnstein's continuum. Even though stakeholders have opportunities to participate, are their views and opinions incorporated into the SDR? Is participation limited to public meetings where residents are bombarded with information and then have very little time to evaluate and respond effectively? If residents respond, are their opinions given merit and allowed to inform the process? In short, does the participation reach levels of actual citizen power as described by Arnstein? This criterion will be evaluated in the SDR reports by identifying how citizens have informed and impacted the SDR process.

The fifth and final criterion will be the *Follow-Up* of the SDR by the municipality with those that engaged in the process. This method may be any interaction that seeks to test or understand whether or not those that participated in the SDR felt that they were heard and had an adequate opportunity to affect the process. A critical part of the SDR process, as outlined in the Guide, includes the necessity of continually monitoring and evaluating any changes to the process. Through this type of follow-up evaluation, municipalities can use the information to "help the municipality recognize and evaluate its strengths, weaknesses and overall performance with respect to all municipal functions and processes, not just service delivery" (Ontario, 2004 p.69). This requirement applies just as essentially to aspects of public participation. By coordinating a follow-up with the participants, the municipalities are signaling that they are committed to participation and willing to continue their efforts in the future. Thus, this criterion is measured by whether or not a follow-up occurred.

**Figure 6: Public Participation in SDRs Evaluation Matrix**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Key Indicators</b>	<b>Methods and Sources</b>
1. Invitation to Participate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertisements for expression of interest</li> <li>• Personal invitations</li> <li>• Council mandated inclusions on committees</li> </ul>	Document review/SDR Reports
2. Diversity of Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consideration for diversity in municipality</li> <li>• Support for intragenerational equity               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Diversity of participants advertised for</li> <li>○ Composition of participants built into SDR</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Support for intergenerational equity               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mandate to focus on sustainability of service and not just short term</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Document review/SDR Reports
3. Opportunity to Participate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different types of participation used (ie. Focus groups, committees, public meetings, surveys etc.)</li> <li>• Meetings focus on allowing those that may not always attend to participate (ie. Childcare available, food available, transportation)</li> </ul>	Document review/SDR Reports

4. Level of Participant Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participants given input on technical aspects</li><li>• Participant input requirement of SDR goals</li><li>• Tangible aspects of participation seen in SDR outcomes</li></ul>	Document review/SDR Reports
5. Follow -Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Future reporting acknowledged as requirement for SDR in some way.</li></ul>	Document review/SDR Reports

## **Chapter 6: Evaluation of the Guide**

The Guide to Service Delivery Review for Municipal Managers was first published in 2004, however, SDRs have come into vogue in municipalities only recently. While the Guide defines a SDR as focusing on a *specific* service, many municipalities have applied the process to all municipal services (“Service Delivery Review - Port Hope,” 2012) (“City of Hamilton - Service Delivery Review,” 2011) (Pennachetti & Weldon, 2012). The Guide has since become the basis for municipal SDRs in the province of Ontario. Major themes and directions from the Guide can be found in recent SDRs including those developed in Toronto, London, Hamilton and Port Hope. However, the Guide is infrequently cited within SDRs. Currently, the Guide exists as the only “how-to” manual for Ontario municipalities and despite its popularity, no formal critiques of the Guide have been published.

### **Planning for the SDR**

Lamothe’s (2008) article, *Examining Local Government Service Delivery Arrangements Over Time*, also examines the structure and style of service delivery changes. This article considers why governments choose to provide services in the manner that they do. Lamothe collects information from an American source that tracked the provision of different types of government services from municipal, state and federal levels. Using data from 1997 and 2002, the researchers conducted tests to discover the constraints and incentives on the delivery of services. The indicators of change which the researchers tested for include: inertia, service characteristics, vendor type, and jurisdictional characteristics. The investigation showed that inertia, including the context of past decisions and managerial competence, had the greatest influence on the likelihood of whether or not service delivery models change. These issues underscore the premise that municipalities are more likely to continue offering services the same way they have always done. If waste collection has historically been contracted, service reviews are likely to maintain the status quo (Lamothe, 2008).

Functionally, the link between managerial competence and an ability to facilitate change suggests that the Guide has chosen the right audience by focusing on municipal managers.

Lamothe notes that,

Inertia constrains choice in both directions, that is, reluctance to contract out internally produced services and unwillingness to bring partially or completely contracted services in-house. Managers' concerns about costs associated with changing production modes also create a bias in favor of the status quo. The governance structures and skills needed to manage in house service production can be quite different from the structures and skills required to contract with outside vendors (Lamothe, 2008, p. 29).

Based on the article from Lamothe, the Guide has offered a sound basis for the extensive planning of a SDR. By structuring the Guide as a “how-to” manual directed towards municipal managers, Lamothe’s concerns regarding managerial inertia can be overcome. Additionally, the Guide focuses heavily on creating a high level council overview of the SDR process. This combination of extensive pre-planning and ongoing monitoring will support the SDR as it progresses and keep longer reviews on course.

One area for concern noted within the Guide and highlighted by Dollery et al. (2011) is the need to include stakeholders in the SDR process. Although, the Guide does include the necessity of stakeholder comments, it also cautions managers that “vocal positions may not accurately reflect the views of council’s constituency” (Ontario et al., 2004, p. 18). Conversely, the LMCC case seemed to find great success through the inclusion of stakeholders at every step of the process. The public was involved at the most basic policy level as described in the LMCC Community Engagement Strategy. Rather than simply pushing information about the service review to citizens, the LMCC allowed the Community Advisory Group to “Assess service against service...Assess financial restrictions against services... and identify levels and standards of services that best meet their needs and expectations” (Service Review Community Engagement Core Group, 2009 p. 4). Additionally, the LMCC encouraged the public to interact in more areas than just the service review. Dollery et al. (2011) note that the service review should not be

viewed as an isolated strategy for the LMCC. The service review itself, “served to provide invaluable support for the newly introduced Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework (IPRF)...and also with the recommendations contained in the 2009 NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal’s (IPART) Review into the Revenue Framework for Local Government” (Dollery et al., 2011, p. 20). Consequently, the deep citizen engagement benefited both the service review, and also the extended planning processes that the municipality was working towards.

### **Performance Measurement and Evaluation**

The Guide’s focus on performance measurement and evaluation is an important aspect of the SDR process. However, rather than referring to detailed external literature regarding performance measurement and cost benefit analysis, the Guide offers simplified instructions on the general nature of these evaluation techniques. The literature, in comparison, refers to the effectiveness and benefit of SDR evaluations.

By simplifying these techniques, the Guide attempts to make the concepts more understandable for municipal managers who may not be skilled in these areas. However, these concepts are naturally complex and time intensive. The Guide points municipalities to use similar methods as those used to prepare their Municipal Performance Measurement Program (MPMP) reports as a good base for their performance measures (Ontario et al., 2004). Unfortunately, reliance on the MPMP has prompted a number of concerns from academics and practitioners. Schatteman (2010) describes that, “most of the municipalities are not producing reports that are informative, useful or that support accountability to anyone other than the Province of Ontario” (2010, p. 542).

Two main sources of information that would benefit the performance measurement and evaluation process are the *W.K. Kellogg Foundation Program Logic Model Guide* and Pal’s *Beyond Policy Analysis: public issue management in turbulent times*. These sources offer both



specific understandings of how to view programs and also, measure their effects. Pal (2010) focuses on program and policy evaluation in a Canadian context. While municipal managers may have a basic understanding of how to facilitate performance measurement from the MPMP, the missing elements for effective performance measurement can be found by using applications from Pal.

Additionally, the Guide refers to the usefulness of incorporating a program logic model into the SDR. This model, “enables you to think through what the service or program is trying to achieve, the steps taken to get there and your assumptions on how things work” (Ontario et al., 2004, p. 28). As the Kellogg Foundation describes, the logic model is an important part of program evaluation as it, “presents program information and progress toward goals in ways that inform, advocate for a particular program approach, and teach program stakeholders” (Foundation, n.d., p. 5). However, the Guide does not offer practical help to create the model. In contrast, the Kellogg Foundation guide offers detailed step-by-step instructions on how to develop both simple and complex logic models and evaluate their results. These two sources, Pal and the Kellogg Foundation, present a thorough understanding for the basis of performance measurement and evaluation.

The Guide also omits a crucial step in the performance measurement process by not incorporating continued stakeholder involvement. Stakeholders and citizen input are not mentioned, despite the detailed information on the establishment of performance measures for different services. This type of citizen related input is most closely associated with an emerging municipal management trend known as participatory budgeting.

The Guide’s authors are reluctant to suggest methods for citizen engagement but acknowledge the importance of public input within the SDR process. In Appendix 4 of the Guide, it is suggested that the best time to involve the public is simply during the planning stages of the SDR, stating: “Service delivery review is a resource-intensive exercise, and before

undertaking it, some municipalities conduct a ‘public interest test’ to find out if they are in the right business in maintaining formal involvement delivering a specific service or a range of services” (Ontario et al., 2004, p. 92). This interest is similar to participatory budgeting, which “allows the participation of non-elected citizens in the conception and/or allocation of public finances” (Sintomer, 2008, p. 168). Participatory budgeting advocates greater public involvement in public service delivery by offering more opportunities for deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy suggests, “that the public can improve democracy by questioning and participating in governance, ensuring that government is run by the public's standards” (Salkin & Gottlieb, 2011, p. 757). As seen in the LMCC case, the engagement of the public can be successful at all stages of the process. This engagement can then be a springboard to facilitate further long term planning strategies.

There are a number of articles which examine the emergence of participatory budgeting and the experiences of municipalities which have engaged in this process. Salkin & Gottlieb (2011) focus on the theory of deliberative democracy and concepts of citizen engagement in the fiscal review and budget development process of municipalities. They then describe many different methods which may be used to elicit the public’s opinion of how budgetary finances should be allocated. One interesting link to SDRs is that even though the article mainly examines New York State’s municipal system, it also considers the Toronto Core Service Review as one example of the participatory budgeting process.

Franklin (2009) examines the value that elected officials place on participatory budget mechanisms. The researchers examine mainly mid-west American states, considering cities with populations between 10,000 and 200,000. This review identified the main types of participatory budget processes that were utilized were public meetings and special budget hearings. Although these approaches were most common, elected officials did not consider them the most effective citizen engagement mechanisms. The highest correlation of public budget mechanisms and the

ratings of elected officials pointed towards use of surveys. Residents who responded to the budget were most concerned with community building, informing decisions, two-way communication and educating the public.

Finally, Zhang & Liao (2011) evaluate why municipalities engage in the use of participatory budgeting mechanisms. Surprisingly, the main obstacle for the introduction of participatory opportunities is simply the willingness of Council and managers to allow the opportunity. The findings suggest that,

In the budgeting process, whether a municipality provides more or fewer two-way dialogue mechanisms for citizens depends on the beliefs of elected officials and the rational evaluations of professional managers, especially their evaluations of citizens' interest and participation costs. (Zhang & Liao, 2011, p. 297).

The development of performance measures is a very important aspect of the Guide. The measures themselves will allow the municipality to create a standardized protocol for service expectation and eventually show where services are succeeding or failing. This section of the Guide should incorporate the recommendations noted previously to perform program and policy evaluation, as well as, consider the program logic model guide for inclusion.

Public participation within the process of performance measurement is also highly pertinent. Performance measurements may reflect values that are not important to residents if consultation and two way communication between managers and residents is excluded.

The articles regarding participatory budgeting and public involvement mechanisms all show that opportunities exist which allow greater public involvement in the evaluation of services and their costs. The Guide does not offer direct methods by which citizens should be engaged in the process but leaves the option open to municipal managers. This open-ended suggestion often leads to a reduced level of engagement with the public. As Zhang and Liao state,

The preferences of government officials affect the opportunity and the nature of public participation. First, a citizen presence in budgeting is expected to make decisions more expensive than those made only by a group of "experts." Second,

engaging citizens in decision making requires adjusting the traditional governance model and developing new infrastructures for the new collaborative governance. Doing so constitutes a substantial change that is beneficial to the community as a whole but may have uncertain consequences for the decision makers. (Zhang & Liao, 2011, p. 285)

By altering the model of citizen engagement to allow more collaborative input on performance measures the municipality can establish measures that create a more accurate accounting of service delivery quantifiers and goals.

### **Service Delivery Options**

The Guide finds that performance measurement will lead directly to a detailed cost benefit analysis of whether or not services should be conducted in-house or contracted out. Essentially, the Guide suggests that all service delivery options should be evaluated on the same matrix that the original service was studied. Eventually, the comparator is measured against the current level of service to determine whether the proposed option offers benefits or drawbacks.

While the Guide offers a logical progression by using the same evaluation method of options as those that were used for the original service delivery, Lamothe (2008) presents useful cautions for why some delivery methods are chosen over others. Specifically, the issue of inertia and managerial competence in examining alternative service delivery models should be addressed. In these chapters, the Guide's "how-to" nature will help overcome these potential concerns discussed by Lamothe.

### **Implementation and Evaluation**

The final steps of service delivery implementation and evaluation are well considered by the Guide. Essentially, the outputs are consistently re-evaluated to ensure that they are meeting desired targets. This type of perpetual monitoring allows for dynamic adjustment when necessary and will allow for open and transparent feedback and reporting to municipal council and stakeholders.

## Discussion

The Guide is an important “how-to” manual for municipal managers to use when they are developing and implementing a SDR. The topics covered in the Guide seem to be an ambitious attempt to facilitate understanding and expertise of very complex issues such as performance measurement, citizen engagement, and program evaluation. However, the Guide falls short of its intentions by overwhelming managers with all of these topics.

A literature review of the major topics contained within the Guide shows that the MMAH has presented a thorough description of the required elements in performing a SDR. Specifically, the Guide outlines that the preparation and planning stages of the SDR must be well constructed with important consideration of strategic goal setting. Lamothe clearly identifies the municipal manager as the most important actor to facilitate the success of an SDR. The Guide has chosen the best audience to develop lasting change by directing the SDR at municipal managers rather than Council or external stakeholders. Additionally, the implementation of service delivery options and the related subsequent review are well planned and outlined by the Guide.

Despite the many important inclusions in the Guide for developing a sound SDR, there is a significant lack of public participation built into the SDR process. The Guide appears to suggest that citizen engagement will produce voices that do not reflect the constituency as a whole. It may be that the MMAH is advocating an overly conservative approach to public inclusion that is too concerned with the potential drawbacks from extensive public consultation. As Zhang & Liao acknowledge,

Public officials have a major obstacle to effective participatory budgeting as government structures and community characteristics cannot be easily changed. In particular, unhealthy local politics will significantly prevent government from adopting two-way mechanisms for participatory budgeting. In the meantime, if the mayor undervalues public engagement and the manager discounts the interest of citizens in participatory budgeting and overestimates the costs of participatory budgeting, then less opportunity will be provided for citizens to discuss budgetary issues with their municipal officials. (Zhang & Liao, 2011, p. 299)

The Guide attempts to offer a detailed hands-on approach for evaluating the performance measurement of varying services. This evaluation of performance is a very complex and detailed topic that could potentially require more time and effort than the Guide proposes for the entire SDR. While the Guide does offer links to some other examples of performance measurement, there is little practical information available in the Guide's Appendices to assist municipal managers.

The Guide recognizes the problems of integrating citizen participation within the SDR process and cautions municipal administrators to place limits on the amount of input that citizens have. The Guide's concerns relate more to the ability of a vocal minority to overshadow the process by stating that, "Council needs to balance those opinions carefully, since the most vocal positions may not accurately reflect the views of council's constituency" (Ontario et al., 2004, p. 18).

The Guide, and its subsequent summary targeted at municipal councillors, frames the SDR process through the following statement,

Meaningful service delivery review incorporates skills, knowledge and experience from many professional disciplines, including service management, labour relations, financial analysis, operational analysis and cost accounting.

Effective reviews are also informed by a thorough understanding of the service area under review. Technical knowledge will be called on to decide matters such as where to put a fire station or when best to clear snow. ("Making Choices, Building Strong Communities: A Guide to Service Delivery Review for Municipal Councillors and Senior Staff," 2010, p. 4)

This process, as shown by the Guide, does not incorporate meaningful citizen participation.

Since municipal services exist to meet the needs of citizens, it is appropriate to seek public input during the review of these services.

## **Chapter 7: Case Studies**

SDRs from six municipalities will be evaluated using the established matrix of public participation. The cases were chosen based on a number of differentiating factors, including the availability of information regarding their SDRs, the scope of the SDRs which encompassed all services within their municipalities and finally their population and location. While most of the municipalities are in close geographic proximity, the style of their SDRs are very different. The cases are all single tier municipalities with the exception of Port Hope which is a lower tier government within Northumberland County. Additionally, these municipalities with the exception of Port Hope and Brockville, are all located in Southern Ontario near the Greater Toronto Area. However, despite many similarities between type of government and physical location, the SDRs were conducted very differently and resulted in a variety of outcomes. To present these cases and the levels of public participation used in their SDRs, I will provide information that gives the best context of each case.

### **Under 30,000 Population**

**Brockville** (B. Casselman, 2007a, 2007b; Bob Casselman, 2010)

**Population:** 21,870 (2011 Census)

**Review Period:** 2007-2008 **Report:** November 2010

#### **Stated Purpose of SDR:**

“The following purpose statement is proposed to clarify Council's intentions for proceeding with a Corporate Service Review...To systematically examine the City of Brockville's existing service delivery and develop options and strategies that will enable the City to match resources to services in the immediate and long-term future.” (B. Casselman, 2007b, p. 3)

#### **Notes regarding Participation:**

The SDR conducted by Brockville had a generalized list of participants. The participants were only identified as “stakeholders” and “the public.” This generalized view seemed to result in a limited scope of interaction for residents. Specifically, in the work plan for the SDR, the

public consultation did not occur until after the service area priorities had been set. The city's staff highlighted the success of the SDR and their efforts by describing the ongoing process which the SDR would maintain.

The Service Delivery Review exercise has proven to be a success in finding operational efficiencies. Staff should review service levels/organizational structure annually based upon corporate needs and circumstances. Service Delivery Review should be viewed as a long-term program that will become an ongoing part of our organizational culture. (B. Casselman, 2007a, p. 9)

This limited style of consultation with the public and staff's self-congratulatory statements eventually led to negative feedback from interest groups. Almost two years after the completion of the SDR, the Brockville and District Chamber of Commerce highlighted the missed opportunities during the SDR process and went as far as to consider the SDR to be solely *internal* in nature. Brockville's staff pushed back against this statement by commenting that further involvement from citizens will only highlight activities that staff are not interested in reviewing and that any reviews from citizens would only duplicate the efforts of staff (B. Casselman, 2007b, p. 2). Eventually, due to the city's refusal to allow input by the public, both staff and the citizens simply began referring to the SDR as the *Internal Service Review*. The internal title is important to note as less than a year after the letter to Council by the Chamber of Commerce, Brockville Council began contemplating a new SDR which would be conducted by external consultants and pay greater attention to concerns posed by citizens regarding their services (Zajac, 2011).

#### **Stated Next Steps:**

Brockville identified that the SDR resulted in operating efficiencies of \$2.3 million or 8% of the tax levy. Further, the opportunities for greater and more detailed reviews exist with annual reports to be given to Council.



**Port Hope** (“Service Delivery Review - Port Hope,” 2012)**Population:** 16,214 (2011 Census)**Review Period:** August 2011 – October 2012 **Report:** November 2012**Stated Purpose of SDR:**

A SDR allows the public, Council and staff to better understand the services the Municipality provides and to assist in making more informed strategic choices regarding those services. Hopefully a SDR document will initiate discussion and the exchange of ideas on each service leading to:

- A confirmation of current services and delivery practices; or
- A want to investigate further service delivery methods and/or the level of service; or
- A want to implement new opportunities or directions (e.g. add, delete, adjust services and/or delivery method).

SDR is not solely about cost but rather, as a Municipality, what we do, why we do it, how we do it and is there a better way. Typically Council determines “what” services the Municipality will provide and administration (staff) determines “how” these services are delivered within the resources allotted by Council. (“Service Delivery Review - Port Hope,” 2012, p. 7)

**Notes regarding Participation:**

The Municipality of Port Hope chose not to involve the public in its review. All consultation and evaluation was conducted solely by staff. In subsequent reports to Council, staff in Port Hope continually stressed that the SDR was conducted as a way to create greater awareness of the municipality’s services and generate dialogue about how to affect change. However, this dialogue is only addressed at the Council level, and does not facilitate broader public discussion. The municipality’s Chief Administrative Officer commented that “Details of the review will include public perception of any particular service as determined through anecdotal or formal comments received over time” (Rellinger, 2012). Through this statement, it becomes evident that the municipality was cautious of allowing direct comments from the public to influence what was a purely internal process. Staff for Port Hope appeared to be very concerned with the timelines of when and how the SDR would commence. By beginning the process in late May 2012, the final report to Council was dated early November which highlights the speed with which staff desired to finish the SDR.

The main focus of public participation for Port Hope appeared to be a concurrent review of the Port Hope Police department which began in late 2011 and finished in October 2012. This review of the policing services gathered much more media coverage than the full SDR and even involved public open houses which allowed individuals to influence municipal council on the outcome of the review (“Port Hope Council Votes to Maintain Hybrid Policing Model,” 2012).

**Stated Next Steps:**

The Municipality of Port Hope eventually drafted action items regarding the SDR for approval by Council. As of September 2013, these action items were being reported on by staff for approval by Council. However, larger discussions face the municipality as the upper tier government of Northumberland is currently deliberating whether or not a full amalgamation of all lower tier government is financially feasible. (McDonald, 2013)

**Between 30,000 and 100,000 Population**

**Brantford** (Lee, 2012) (City of Brantford, 2012)

**Population:** 93,650(2011 Census)

**Review Period:** July 2012 – September 2012 **Report:** October 2012

**Stated Purpose of SDR:**

“The intent of the...ISDR (Intelligent Service Delivery Review) consultation process is to ensure:

- That citizens are afforded multiple opportunities to provide their comments on the Taxpayer Bill of Rights document in order to finalize the document for adoption and implementation by City Council prior to the consideration of the 2013 Operating and Capital Budgets.
- That citizens are provided with informative and useful information relating to the City’s structure of municipal services including the costs of providing these services and the regulatory framework surrounding them,

and that multiple opportunities are made available to solicit public input on this service structure in order to determine the public's service priorities and needs.”

(City of Brantford, 2012, p. 1)

### **Notes regarding Participation:**

This SDR is unique among the case studies being evaluated. Rather than focusing on a plan to draft a lasting report and documentation, the City of Brantford used the SDR to prepare the municipality for their upcoming yearly budget. The plan and campaign to attract participation regarding service delivery and levels was far ranging and varied. Media, online advertisements, email blasts to mailing lists and physical posters were just a few of the methods used to draw in respondents. However, despite this extensive campaign, the opportunities to participate were limited to an online survey and two public open houses to discuss service levels. While the action plan and follow up were highly detailed, the consultation had few methods of community inclusion. Additionally, by only inviting opinions on services at a single moment in time, the results of the survey only provide a valid assessment of the period that they were taken.

### **Stated Next Steps:**

The City of Brantford utilized public consultation to help formulate and add to the municipal strategic plan. This approach generalized many of the sentiments of respondents into a document labelled the Taxpayers Bill of Rights. This document was meant to inform the city on strategic budget directions in the upcoming years.

**Halton Hills** (Town of Halton Hills, 2011a)(Town of Halton Hills, 2011b)(“Minutes - Council Meeting Town of Halton Hills Tuesday May 10, 2011,” 2011)(“Corporate Affairs Committee Minutes - August 23, 2010,” 2010)

**Population:** 59,008 (2011 Census)

**Review Period:** August 2009 – July 2010 **Report:** August 2010

### **Stated Purpose of SDR:**

“In keeping with Community expectations regarding Service Delivery and Community concerns regarding taxes and fees, the Town wishes to undertake a Study to ensure that its services are

being delivered in an efficient and effective manner when compared to other municipalities that the Town considers similar to itself, and that the services delivered by the Town are in keeping with the Community's objectives" (Town of Halton Hills, 2011b, p. 2).

#### **Notes regarding Participation:**

Halton Hills also chose not to involve the public in the SDR. Consultation and implementation were conducted solely at the staff level and did not address or involve the public in any way. While the SDR was conducted by an outside consulting firm, the most prominent need for improvement related to the requirement to enhance communication and feedback with the public.

Less than a year later, under a new council term, the Town of Halton Hills engaged in a "Citizen Service Delivery and Performance Measurement Telephone Survey" which investigated:

- Quality of life in Halton Hills
- Town Communications
- Importance of Town Services
- Satisfaction with Town Services
- General Perceptions of Service Delivery and Strategic Priorities

While this survey discussed items which could directly relate to the SDR, there was no mention of the review in any of the staff reports regarding the survey. Instead, the survey updated a previous survey conducted in 2005. It is unclear why the 2011 survey ignored the results of the SDR.

#### **Stated Next Steps:**

Once the final report was delivered to Council, staff sought approval to initiate the recommendations found within the report. However, the timing of the report occurred less than two months before the next municipal election. Consequently, council deferred any action on the report until the following budget year with the new Council. The new Council eventually began addressing the recommendations while simultaneously undertaking a citizen survey to discuss

service delivery and performance measurement that was generally considered unconnected to the SDR (“Minutes - Council Meeting Town of Halton Hills Tuesday May 10, 2011,” 2011).

### **Over 100,000 Population**

**Barrie** (City of Barrie, 2005)

**Population:** 136,063 (2011 Census)

**Review Period:** December 2004 – May 2005 **Report:** May 2005

#### **Stated Purpose of SDR:**

“The project specific goal was to undertake a high-level diagnostic of the organization. In so doing, [the consultant] used qualitative and quantitative techniques and tools to assess, validate and identify programs and services that may be subject to further review for recommended changes. Subsequent phases of the SDR may be undertaken” (City of Barrie, 2005, p. 2).

#### **Notes regarding Participation:**

Public participation in the Barrie case was present, but subject to severe limitations. Despite the size of the municipality, very few residents were given an opportunity to participate. The SDR involved interviews with 38 individuals, which included Council members, senior staff, representatives of unions and key stakeholders from the community. This tiny group of residents were also limited in scope of diversity as they were “Selected Business Ambassadors” nominated by Council members.

In the concluding remarks, the SDR report identifies that one of the weaknesses of the study was lack of a mechanism to “measure the expectations and/or level of satisfaction of the community relative to the services, their quality and their costs” (City of Barrie, 2005, p. 41).

#### **Stated Next Steps:**

The consultants who conducted the SDR according to the parameters of the municipality made a number recommendations for follow up. Among these recommendations are sections which highlight the lack of a cohesive public participation strategy. The recommendation

suggests, “That the City consider formalizing the development of a detailed Citizen Participation Strategy or policy built on the principles already cited by the City, its past experience with citizen participation and utilizing the [participation] guidelines (City of Barrie, 2005, p. 41).

**Hamilton** (City of Hamilton, 2012)(“City of Hamilton - Service Delivery Review,” 2011)

**Population:** 519,949 (2011 Census)

**Review Period:** April 2012 – February 2013 **Report:** April 2013

**Stated Purpose of SDR:**

“Municipalities across Canada are focusing on service as a means to address the growing demands from citizens and Councils to manage the cost of delivery and show value for money through:

- *Improving our Services* – can the efficiency, effectiveness and quality be improved?
- *Back to Service Basics* – what services do we provide, are they core to our business, what value are they offering, do we offer the right services?
- *Service Levels* – who decided what service level we currently offer, how much would it cost to improve the service level, is the public prepared to pay for the current level of service or should it be reduced?
- *Service Accountability* – who is accountable for what services, is the allocation correct or does it need to be adjusted?
- *Alternate Service Delivery* – can services be delivered in other ways? Partnerships, in-source, electronic service delivery for all or a portion of our services?
- *Service Operations* – how do we deliver a service, are there better ways, can we learn from others?” (City of Hamilton, 2012, p. 6).

**Notes regarding Participation:**

The City of Hamilton also chose not to include any public participation in their SDR. The SDR specifically evaluates what they term “citizen facing” services, yet does not include those citizens in the opportunity to evaluate them. These services were reviewed by staff using benchmarking tools against other municipalities and then directed by business cases. Those services which present the most opportunities for cost savings are then selected for what they term a “deep dive” review with more staff and resources being allocated for the review. All relevant consultations in the SDR only include staff and other municipal comparators. While the Hamilton staff report contains a section listing “Alternatives” to the proposed process, no option to include citizen participation is included.

### **Stated Next Steps:**

The SDR was conducted by consultants for the municipality. Concurrent to the SDR, the City had also engaged another consulting firm to begin an online engagement campaign to review resident's views about city services. While this campaign was not directly linked to the SDR, the City may have benefitted from the crossover of information. Unfortunately, when the engagement process was just beginning, a comment on social media by the consulting firm drew waves of criticism from news outlets across Canada and Hamilton residents. Within 48 hours of the negative feedback, the City cancelled the engagement plan.

### **Case Study Analysis**

The case studies reveal that there is no standardized or consistent approach to public participation or SDRs in general in Ontario. Even given many similarities between geographical proximity and length of review, the methods which were selected were very different. Three municipalities chose not to involve the public at all in the SDR process, yet the research reveals that two of those municipalities attempted to foster public input after the SDR had been conducted. However, despite these engagement efforts, they were not part of a formalized evaluation strategy identified in the SDR. Only the municipality of Port Hope appears to have forgone any public participation during the SDR process.

Of the three municipalities that did engage in public participation, there was great diversity in methods and implementation. Brockville and Brantford engaged in the most forms of participation with Brantford promoting on their participation strategy as the main driver of the SDR. While Brockville and Barrie both included participation strategies in their SDR plans, follow-up from both the public and consultants in the Barrie case show that these participation strategies were considered token and unsuccessful. Additionally, Barrie seemed interested in conducting follow ups to the SDR, yet subsequent investigation has not revealed any follow-up activity.

The Brantford SDR was the most inclusive of public participation. Brantford identified and acted on twenty-five methods to invite this participation. Despite the massive campaign to encourage participation, the SDR only allowed three methods of participation, a survey, public meeting and a standing invitation to address Brantford Council. Additionally, the community was given chances to follow up with the city at two public open houses.

Of note within the Brantford case is the temporal nature in which the SDR was conducted. As discussed in the evaluation, Brantford focused their SDR on the upcoming municipal budget year. While survey respondents were given the opportunity to evaluate and rate the importance of each service, their responses could only impact the upcoming budget year. Additionally, the style of survey asked respondents how they felt currently about the services and did not allow for long term visioning of the service as a whole. Thus, the case did not meet the intergenerational criteria.

## **Chapter 8: Discussion**

The evaluation of case studies provides clear examples of both the successes and shortcomings with regards to municipalities that utilize public participation as part of the SDR process. When there is no inclusion of the public, in the example of Halton Hills, the municipality was forced by a new Council to return to the drawing board and solicit the public's opinion ("Corporate Affairs Committee Minutes - August 23, 2010," 2010). By contrast, the Brockville's SDR relied almost 100% on public participation but was limited to a one year exercise. This exercise diminished the interest of the public in engaging in further participation since their immediate interests were not acted upon.

Many of the responses to SDRs from the public indicate that they see *potential* in the SDR process (Bob Casselman, 2010). The comment and evaluation sections of the Brantford report indicate that staff and municipal officials were staggered by the response rate (City of Brantford, 2012). The public was genuinely interested in discussing their municipal services and



finding ways to improve them. In Hamilton, when a consultant could not understand common acronyms of their municipal services, the public responded angrily to a half-hearted attempt to involve them in discussions about their quality of life (Reilly, Emma, 2013). National news agencies and residents from all over Canada were taken aback that the city seemed to value citizen input so little (Reilly, Emma, 2013).

Each of the evaluation points from the matrix has shown a set of opportunities and limitations through the case studies. As seen from the LMCC case, municipalities that take the time to create a strategic engagement plan will be able to find more success by including the public in their SDRs.

### **Invitation to Participate**

The Brantford case is a clear example of how to be successful when inviting citizens to participate. The advertisements were distributed as widely as possible in twenty-five different mediums, from posters and leaflets to email blasts and a social media campaign. While this type of campaign required significant financial resources, examples from Halton Hills and Hamilton show that council and citizens are interested in participating. Municipalities that which allocate resources to advertising campaigns create significant opportunities for the public to participate compared to those that do not.

The impact of limitations to the *Invitation to Participate* for municipalities can also be considered from the Brantford example. The advertising campaign was on a large scale and was meant to blanket the city with an invitation to participate. Despite the large scale, almost half of all respondents came from the same three digit postal code area which indicates that overall responses may not be indicative of the city as a whole. While the invitation was far reaching, it was not structured in such a way as to interest many of the different groups and individuals in the city. Additionally, the cases in Barrie, Brockville and Halton Hills show that municipalities that are too restrictive in who they allow to participate can face significant setbacks in their SDRs.

### **Diversity of Participants**

The cases appear to have predominantly ignored this criterion. Since many groups were underrepresented in participation, differing views were lacking. Brantford's SDR contained a significant comment section where survey respondents were able to offer generalized notes about the survey. This section showed that many of the opinions offered had little relevance to the SDR being studied. This experience shows that there is an opportunity to engage the public in an environment that helps direct the conversation with more direct interaction. However, the timeline presented by Brantford did not allow respondents to evaluate the study on a multi-year basis. Essentially, the study became a snapshot in time on public opinion regarding their services rather than a dynamic understanding of how citizens envisioned the possible outcomes of their services.

The remaining cases seemed limited mainly by concerns about how to incorporate different or non-specialized opinions from the public concerning the SDRs. Barrie involved a select few business people nominated by Council, while Brockville included so few that the chamber of commerce eventually referred to the SDR as a totally "internal" process.

### **Opportunity to Participate**

In general, the cases that used public participation seemed to focus mainly on stakeholder interviews as the main method of engaging the public, with the exception of Brantford which used a survey almost exclusively. Unfortunately, data regarding the structure, format, and extent of the stakeholder interviews is not publicly available. Different formats of engagement would bring about new perspectives concerning the topics in the SDR. The structure of the survey focused on current concerns and did not consider long term planning considerations.

Despite the issue with intergenerational equity, the Brantford survey provided an outlet for the respondents to consider how the city should be evaluating the services. One question on the survey asked residents specifically,

Think about Brantford's services overall. Do you think that the City should deliver services that are:

- Better than all other cities
- Better than most other cities
- In line with other cities
- Brantford should not compare itself with other cities when making decisions about services (City of Brantford, 2012, p. 24)

This question relates directly to the benchmarking of services and the evaluative context of the SDR. Overwhelmingly, the respondents chose the option “In line with other cities” which has far reaching implications for future service reviews. This type of opportunity to engage residents adds legitimacy and transparency to the SDR and opens up further opportunities to engage the public in the more technical aspects of the SDR such as benchmarking, service standards and measures of success.

### **Participant Power**

As is clearly evident in the case studies, the public exerted limited influence with regards to the decision making process within the SDR. These limitations were shown by limited invitations to participate or a complete absence of participation opportunities. As shown by the stated purpose of each SDR, all municipalities had the goal of reducing costs to deliver services. These SDRs planned and utilized business case style approaches of evaluation, benchmarking, and detailed in-house studies to determine how and where efficiencies might exist in an effort to reduce costs. From a top down perspective, this type of review does not easily involve non-expert control from the public. However, as discussed by Arnstein and Bishop & Davis, participant power could be incorporated at many points throughout the studies.

While opportunities exist to integrate participant power through the SDR process, the municipalities included in this review were aware that the MMAH Guide highlighted that often

the loudest voice from the public may not represent the majority. This set of concerns is a significant limitation. While investigating media sources on the Brantford SDR, opinions from the comments section expressed a desire from some individuals to scrap the results of the SDR and the related supporting documentation (City of Brantford, 2012). However, opportunities exist to lessen the limitations when paired with the clarity and transparency of the process advocated by Bishop and Davis.

### **Follow-Up**

This criterion was underutilized in all case studies as few cases gave citizens power to help determine the outcomes of the SDRs. Brantford chose to host two public open houses to discuss the application of the survey data in relation to the upcoming budget preparation. Whether these open houses changed the interpretation of the data or if they simply reaffirmed the conclusions found in the SDR is unclear from the data. Most of the information and conclusions from the SDRs was presented in the reports to the municipal councils with no follow-up opportunity for ratepayers.

### **Overview**

Overall, the main limitations of including public participation in SDRs are the complex planning requirements and high cost involved with inviting public participation on a large scale. Also of concern are the political risks that public participation may bring to a SDR. The costs of the advertising campaign taken on by Brantford would most likely make a small municipality on a limited budget shudder. These case studies omitted the inclusion of public participation in the planning stage. Careful planning and control to direct the public's energies may prove beneficial in developing more useful engagement. With careful planning at the beginning of the SDR, Brockville and Barrie may not have been criticized for not listening enough to the public.

In addition to the cost, public participation also appears to take a great deal of time and effort. In the LMCC case, the review began in early 2008 and continued until late 2009. An *interim* report was finally prepared for council in February of 2010 (Dollery et al., 2011). Further conclusions were still to come. This length of time and commitment is an additional consideration for municipalities that wish to conduct a SDR. As seen in the Ontario case studies, many of the full reports occurred within one month after the study finished with only Hamilton planning on continuing the study through their “Deep Dive” reviews into individual services. Municipal administrators have many tasks to complete in their day to day work lives. The inclusion of the public in a process as complicated as an SDR would no doubt substantially increase the time commitment and discourages staff from promoting their inclusion. The Port Hope experience is one that shows how a municipality can find it difficult to deal with increased levels of public participation. It appears that Port Hope focused their public participation efforts on the “hot button” topic of the policing review. The preliminary staff report for the policing review shows that the process was expected to finish in June 2012. However, with high participation from the public, the review extended into October 2012. This experience may have influenced decision makers not to exclude the public from participating in the full SDR.

Risk aversion is another constraint restricting the inclusion of public participation as evidenced in Hamilton’s social media experience. Less than 48 hours after the public and media backlash began, Hamilton’s council cancelled the engagement strategy and fired their consultants (Reilly, Emma, 2013). This reaction shows the type of risk adverse mentality that municipalities operate within. Hamilton’s experience may not have been as sensational if the public felt that their opinions were not being sought simply as a way to check off the box of “public input.” Finally, careful planning and direction would allow Brantford to draw out a longer term review and strategy for delivery of services for residents. As the Guide encourages from the very beginning, having a strategic plan in place is critical when evaluating a range of services.

The Halton Hills case showed that the most important recommendation from the SDR was that council should update the citizen survey which was conducted in 2005 (Perlin, 2012). The results of that updated survey may prove useful in creating a stronger benchmarking system for service reviews. Yet, questions remain regarding why Halton Hills did not tie the survey into the SDR. This unanswered question highlights uncertainty and complexity that municipalities must face when considering the inclusion of public participation in SDRs. Including the public is a highly complex and expensive process which can backfire if not adequately planned for. However, the Halton Hills survey also highlights the necessity of public participation. SDRs which do not contain public participation opportunities were criticized and consistently supplemented by other participation initiatives later in the process to deflect past SDR completion criticisms.

## **Chapter 9: Conclusion**

The question which emerges from this review and the examination of selected case studies is why municipalities are not including public participation in their SDRs. As seen in many of the case studies, SDRs are consistently conducted separately from further public participation initiatives. However, the SDRs are clearly viewed as being incomplete or illegitimate without public participation. It appears that municipalities perceive a full SDR with properly conceived public participation is cost prohibitive and too taxing on staff and therefore, try to complete the review without the major costs involved with public input. Regardless of how they are conceived, SDRs are time consuming and expensive processes which are challenging for both municipal staff and council. Although there are benefits to engaging the users of these services in the process, it adds more complexity to the SDR and is generally outside the scope of the provincial guide.

The Guide appropriately advises municipal administrators that they need to plan extensively and budget accordingly to complete a successful SDR. However, the Guide's

consideration of public participation as an afterthought to the process creates SDRs with suboptimal results.

This paper has evaluated the Guide and determined that while it is a good basis for the creation of a SDR, it is missing opportunities to include the public where they should have more input. By investigating public participation literature it has been seen that there are many opportunities to build participant power into the SDR process and that many different methods of participation are available and effective in facilitating that participation.

The six municipal SDR case studies have highlighted situations where public participation was either used or ignored during a SDR process. The difficulties in including public participation identified throughout the case studies show a lack of adequate planning for public inclusion. Looking at these issues within the case studies, the complexity and cost of facilitating public engagement seem to be the main cause.

Despite this concern, municipalities must remember that they deliver services to residents. Exclusion of residents from the evaluation stage of those services leads municipalities to incur critical opportunity costs that may invalidate much of their efforts, as seen in Halton Hills. By contrast, the LMCC approach created a sense of community ownership of the SDR process and an understanding of the choices citizens must make to get the services they want at a price they can afford.

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